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INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE  
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1369  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4891  
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8457  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6019  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3912  
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC  
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1874  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000584

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DEPT PLEASE PASS TO DEPT OF LABOR ILAB OFFICE  
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/22/2018  
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: ILO SAYS NO COMPLAINTS OF FORCED LABOR IN DELTA

REF: A. RANGOON 519  
[1](#)B. RANGOON 425

Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for reasons 1.4  
(b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Although the exile press continues to report on forced labor in the Irrawaddy Delta after Cyclone Nargis, the ILO Liaison Office has yet to receive any specific forced labor complaints or evidence of forced labor in the delta. According to ILO Liaison Officer Steve Marshall, the ILO's six facilitators in the delta continue to meet with people from affected villages, and have submitted complaints regarding unfair distribution of food and villages manipulating population figures to receive more assistance to UN agencies. None of the facilitators have seen evidence of forced labor, although they have seen villagers voluntarily participating in community rebuilding projects. Marshall conceded that some forced labor likely occurred in the delta, but noted that unless exile groups share specific information about the alleged violations, the ILO could not investigate or raise the issue with the Ministry of Labor. The ILO plans to open an office in the delta in the next few months to assist with ILO cash for work programs, pending funding under the UN's Revised Flash Appeal. This new office will enable the ILO to be able to investigate alleged cases of forced labor in the delta. End Summary.

Media Reports Exaggerated  
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[1](#)2. (C) During a July 21 meeting with ILO Liaison Officer Steve Marshall, he described recent media reports of forced labor in the Irrawaddy Delta post-cyclone Nargis as "grossly exaggerated." The ILO office in Rangoon has not received any forced labor complaints about activities in the delta. To monitor the situation, the ILO has sent six facilitators in the affected areas - four of whom were from the region and have reported on forced labor in the delta in the past - to travel to affected villages and meet with village leaders and villagers. None of the six facilitators have seen any evidence of forced labor in the delta, although they have

reported irregularities to other UN agencies, such as the unfair distribution of food, village leaders manipulating population figures to obtain more assistance, and people selling donated equipment. Despite the lack of evidence, Marshall has raised the issue with the Ministry of Labor several times since May, underscoring the need for education and outreach on labor rights as Burma moves forward with early recovery projects.

13. (C) The ILO facilitators reported to Marshall that villagers had voluntarily participated in community projects, such as cleaning water ponds or rebuilding embankments for village-owned rice paddies. The facilitators, all of whom received ILO training on the definitions of forced labor and labor rights, confirmed with the villagers that the local authorities did not threaten them into assisting on the construction projects. Most villagers, who did not own land and thus worked as day-laborers, explained that since they had no way to return to their livelihoods, they preferred to spend their time working to help the community rather than do nothing. Marshall underscored that voluntary work in community projects, regardless of the project, does not constitute forced labor under the GOB-ILO Supplementary Understanding on Forced Labor.

14. (C) Marshall acknowledged that some forced labor likely occurred in the delta, but without any specific complaints, his office could not conduct a formal investigation (Ref A). He noted that during his meetings with the various exile groups on the Thai-Burma border, he requested that they send

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him information on forced labor. With a name and a location, Marshall could either conduct an investigation or raise the issue directly with the Ministry of Labor. However, none of the exile groups have provided him with any information, instead choosing to talk to the press about unspecific cases. Marshall opined that the unsubstantiated media reports did little to help the situation in Burma, but rather made it more difficult for the ILO to raise the issue of forced labor in the delta with the Burmese Government.

#### Launching a Cash for Work Program

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15. (C) The ILO plans to launch its cash-for-work early recovery program in the delta by mid-August, Marshall noted (Refs A and B). His office currently has \$151,000 for the project, and expects to receive several million dollars from the Japanese for tertiary infrastructure projects, such as roads, small bridges, and drains. Once the ILO has identified a project manager and a field engineer, the team will conduct a one-week assessment, working with community groups to identify priority infrastructure projects. Marshall emphasized the ILO, not the GOB, would determine which projects received funding. The ILO will bring in experts to teach the Burmese participants proper construction and masonry skills, as well as educate them on labor rights, forced labor issues, and how to report any forced labor violations. Marshall noted that his staff will provide Burmese-language copies of the Supplementary Understanding to all participants and village leaders.

16. (C) Once funding is secured, the ILO will open an office in the delta, perhaps in Labutta or Mawlamyinegyun rather than Patheingyi because the towns are closer to the affected areas, according to Marshall. The cash-for-work project manager will head the office and make frequent trips to project sites to monitor the program. Marshall noted that the delta office, which will also accept forced labor complaints and conduct labor outreach to villagers, provided an opportunity for the ILO to expand its footprint in Burma.

Comment

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¶7. (C) While Marshall recognizes that the GOB likely forces some villagers to work in the delta, no one working in the delta - UN agencies, NGOs, Embassy mission trips, or ILO facilitators - has seen any evidence of forced labor. The ILO has creatively found new opportunities to expand its reach throughout the delta, which will better enable it to monitor forced labor in the region. Its cash-for-work program will also provide the opportunity for village leaders and local SPDC officials to observe proper labor practices while providing vulnerable Burmese with cash to resume their livelihoods, as well as an education on labor rights.

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